external to the communications network via respectively corresponding links, the method comprising:

a) receiving from respective signal sources signals which include a control field, which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values, and the subsequent handling of the said signal by the network being controlled according to the value of the control field;

b) within a lower level of a messaging protocol, and prior to the processing of the signal by higher level functions, comparing the value stored in the control field with a set of permissible values, said set being a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values, to determine if the value is a permissible or impermissible value, and if the value is determined to be impermissible, overwriting the control field with a permissible value; and

c) subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the said permissible value from the restricted subset of the plurality of possible values.

2. (*Thrice Amended*) A method of operating a communications network comprising:

a) communicating control signals between nodes of the network via respectively corresponding links which control signals conform to a predetermined signalling protocol;

b) at one of the said nodes, receiving from a signal source external to the network signals conforming to the said predetermined protocol and including a control field, which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values;

c) within said lower level of a messaging protocol running on the node, and prior to the processing of the signal by higher level functions running on the node, comparing the value stored in the control field with a set of permissible values, said set being a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values, to determine if the value is a permissible or impermissible value, and if the value is determined to be impermissible, overwriting the control field with a permissible value; and

d) subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the said permissible value from the restricted subset of the plurality of possible values.

4. (*Twice Amended*) A method according to claim 1, in which the said control field is a routing control field, and the overwriting of the routing control field with a permissible value limits the routing of signals to or from the external sources to only part of the communications network.

5. (*Amended*) A method according to claim 4, in which the routing of signals to or from the external sources is limited to a point-to-point connection ~~between the respective external source and the node.~~

8. (*Twice Amended*) A node suitable for connection in a communications network and comprising:

a) a network interface for connection to the communications network;

b) a signal interface for connection to a signal source external to the communications network via respectively corresponding links;

c) means connected to the signal interface for comparing, within a lower level of a messaging protocol, the value stored in the control field with a set of permissible values, said set being a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values, to determine if the value is a permissible or impermissible value, and if the value is determined to be impermissible, overwriting the control field with a permissible value; and

d) signal processing means for processing the said signal in dependence upon the permissible value adopted by the control field.

9. (*Amended*) A node according to claim 8, in which the said means for comparing is located within a data link layer interface, which data link layer interface is arranged to respond to service requests from network layer functions of the node and to issue service requests to the communications network.

10. (*Twice Amended*) A node according to claim 8, in which the signal processing means is arranged to route the signal in dependence upon the value of the said control field.

13. (*Thrice Amended*) A method of operating a node in a communications network, which node is in use connected to signal sources external to the communications network via respectively corresponding links, the method comprising:

a) receiving from one of the said signal sources signals which include a control field, which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values, and the subsequent handling of the said signal by the network being controlled according to the value of the control field;

b) within a lower level of a messaging protocol running on the node, and prior to the processing of the signal by higher level functions running on the node, comparing the value stored in the control field with a set of permissible values, which set includes a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values, to determine if the value is a permissible or an impermissible value, and in the event that the value is determined to be an impermissible value, overwriting the control field with a permissible value; and

c) subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the permissible value stored in the control field.

14. (*Twice Amended*) A method of operating a communications network comprising:

a) communicating control signals between nodes of the network via respectively corresponding links, which control signals conform to a predetermined signalling protocol;

b) at one of the said nodes, receiving at a low level process from a signal source external to the network signals conforming to the said predetermined protocol and including a control field, which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values;

c) within a lower level of a messaging protocol running on the node, and prior to the processing of the signal by higher level functions running on the node, comparing the value stored in the control field with a set of permissible values, which set includes a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values, to determine if the value is a permissible or an impermissible value, and in the event that the value is determined to be an impermissible value, overwriting the control field with a permissible value; and

d) subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence ~~upon the permissible value stored in the control field.~~

15. (*Thrice Amended*) A method of operating a node in a communications network, which node is in use connected to a signal source external to the communications network via respectively corresponding links, the node including a data link layer interface arranged to respond to service requests from network layer functions of the node and to issue service requests to the communications network, the method comprising:

a) receiving from the said signal source signals which include a control field, which control field takes one of a plurality of possible values, and the subsequent handling of the said signal by the network being controlled according to the value of the control field;

b) within the data link layer interface, and prior to the processing of the signal by higher level functions running on the node, comparing the value stored in the control field with a set of permissible values, which set includes a restricted subset of the plurality of possible values, to determine if the value is a permissible or an impermissible value and, in the event that the value is determined to be an impermissible value, overwriting the control field with a permissible value; and

c) subsequently processing the signal in the network in dependence upon the permissible value taken by the control field.

16. (*Twice Amended*) A method according to claim 1 comprising writing control field data received on each of a plurality of signalling links into respective signalling link data buffers, and, when required, overwriting